AN: Well, this is pretty much the beginning of the end, folks. *Poison* has been quite an exciting ride – and now there are only two stories to go! Anything can happen, of course. But I won't spoil anything. You know I never do…

Poison

Face Off

TPYMK clambered to his feet, adjusting his coat and surveying the area. He sniffed the air carefully, as if searching for something. Not that his sense of smell was as finally tuned as that of an animal. In fact, the only thing he could smell right now was Sarafina. She really needed to bathe more often…

"What are you doing?" Sarafina asked, getting to her paws. "Sniffing out food? I'd prefer a drink, actually… Got any of that chocolate milk?"

"No," TPYMK said bluntly, looking somewhat suspicious. "Something's not right here."

"Not right?" said Sarafina. She started looking around. "What do you—"

"Shh!" TPYMK hissed, twisting her head back around so she was staring down at the river. "Be quiet. Don't let them know you're watching."

"Don't let *who* know?" Sarafina yelled.

"Shh!" he said again. "Keep your voice down."

"Okay," Sarafina said, now whispering. "What's going on?"

"I think we're being watched," TPYMK said.

"How do you know?" said Sarafina.

"Call it a gut feeling," TPYMK told her. "I just feel like someone else is here."

"But who?" wondered Sarafina. "Who would be watching us? No

one's exactly going to want to survey a druggie—"

"But they might just be interested in her detective friend," TPYMK interrupted. "I'm probably the only person on the planet who knows this much about the drug operation. That puts*both* of us at risk."

"I'm in this just as much as you are," Sarafina said. "We're both equal here."

"Whatever you make of it, we're still probably seconds away from being shot," TPYMK said, much to Sarafina's shock. He noticed her reaction. "Oh, yeah. Anything could happen. I bet they're on to us right now."

"Who?" Sarafina demanded.

"Probably the people who blew up my house," TPYMK answered. "I think they've noticed by now that we're not actually dead. I bet they've come back to finish the job."

"Come to think of it," Sarafina said, looking nervous, "there is a kind of… shiver running down my spine. It feels like someone's right behind me…"

At that moment, TPYMK turned around and punched the Interceptor in the face.

"*Wah!*" The assassin tumbled backwards, dropping the knife which he had been scraping quietly across Sarafina's back. That 'shiver' running down her spine was a lot more telling than she thought… "You stupid sausage!"

The Interceptor clamped a paw against his nose, which was bleeding profusely.

TPYMK kicked the assassin in the stomach, causing him to roll over onto his stomach, groaning loudly in pain. "Shut up."

"What are you doing?" Sarafina asked, watching with wide eyes as TPYMK pulled a pistol out from his trenchcoat pocket.

"Getting some answers," the detective replied, grabbing the Interceptor roughly by the fur on his head and jabbing the gun in his face. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Easy, sausage," the Interceptor said, eyeing the gun. "You're going to hurt somebody if you're not too careful."

"Yeah – *you*," TPYMK said. "Now, unless you want the trees to be decorated with your brain, I think you'd better start talking."

"Wait, do you *know* him?" Sarafina asked, bewildered.

"Of course I do," TPYMK said. "Me and the Interceptor go way back. I was under the impression that he was just a petty offender. Looks like I was wrong."

"He was sent here to kill us?" Sarafina said.

"Well, *duh!*" said the Interceptor. "That's my job. I'm an assassin."

TPYMK jabbed the end of his gun into the Interceptor's cheek, shutting him up. "Keep insulting her and I'll shoot," he warned. "Now, tell me who sent you."

"My boss," the Interceptor said.

"I kinda figured that," TPYMK said. "What's his name?"

"I don't know," the Interceptor responded. "He just calls himself Death."

"I should've known," TPYMK said.

"Should've known what?" said Sarafina.

"Death isn't his real name," TPYMK explained. "It's just a pseudonym. A pen name."

"Like ThatPersonYouMightKnow?" Sarafina presumed. "Your parents would have to be pretty sick to come up with that name."

"Some secrets are better left unrevealed," TPYMK replied.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Sarafina exclaimed.

"Look, if you must know, my real name is—"

"Are you two lovebirds finished with your argument?" the Interceptor cut in. "I kinda have places to go."

"You're going straight to jail," TPYMK retorted. "Why does Death want us taken out?"

"Why do you think?" said the Interceptor. "You're the only two people standing in his way. Once you're gone, the Sumu will be selling like hotcakes again. You've royally screwed up this part of the operation. Sales are low. The customers are hiding. They're scared that something might happen."

"Like what?" TPYMK asked.

"Rival gangs," the Interceptor said. "They've been known to poison whole supplies of drugs in order to kill off the competition. Anything can happen in this business."

"Yeah," TPYMK said. "Until I shut it down."

"You won't catch him," the Interceptor said confidently. "He's hiding."

"Oh, is he?" TPYMK asked. "Well, now you can tell me – otherwise I'm gonna shove your head up your nose."

"Is that even possible?" Sarafina asked.

"You'd be surprised what you can do with a sharp knife," TPYMK said.

"He's at the lab," the Interceptor told him, realising that he wasn't going to be able to get out of this without spilling all the secrets he knew. "He's waiting for me to come back – with your bodies."

"Oh, don't worry," TPYMK said. "He'll be seeing us soon enough." He threw the Interceptor to the ground. "Come on, Sarafina. Let's get out of here."

TPYMK turned around, walking away. Sarafina spared the Interceptor one last glance before following him.

"*Rah!*"

With a furious growl, the Interceptor grabbed his knife and leapt at the detective—

—only for him to be sent flying back by three bullets from TPYMK's pistol.

The Interceptor collapsed against a tree, slumping to the ground, blood pouring from three large holes in his chest. The hunter's eyes slowly closed. He was dead within seconds.

"I had a feeling he'd do that," TPYMK said, pocketing his gun. "Typical backstabbing technique. *Literally*, in this case."

"I thought he really would slice you, then," Sarafina said, almost looked worried. "The last thing I want is for you to be cut up by some Welsh psycho."

"I think he's Scottish," TPYMK said.

"Whatever," Sarafina said, shrugging. "I got a D in geography. Sue me."

"It doesn't matter," TPYMK said. "We know where Death is – and we can break into the lab."

"How?"

"I think I know a way," TPYMK replied, walking away once more. "We'll have to be careful, though. The last thing I want is to fall into some kind of trap."

Ka-chunk!

TPYMK froze as a gun was pressed against the back of his head.

Slowly, he turned around…

… to find Sarafina aiming a pistol at him.

The detective's eyes narrowed. "Sarafina?" he said. "What are you doing?"

"You knew it would come to this," Sarafina said, glaring at TPYMK, her eyes filled with hatred. "You *knew*."

"What are you talking about?" TPYMK exclaimed. "Sarafina, put the gun down."

He tried to lower her foreleg, but she shoved the gun right into his face.

"*Don't make a move!*" she snapped. "Try anything and I'll blow your face off."

"Oh, I'm sure you've blown off plenty of things in your time," TPYMK said.

Sarafina smacked him across the face. TPYMK recoiled, blood dripping from three scars running down his cheek. Her claws had obviously grown back since getting off the drugs…

"Shut up," Sarafina snarled.

"No," TPYMK said defiantly, staring into her eyes. "What the hell are you up to?"

"This is all your fault," Sarafina said. "If I'd never met you, none of this would've happened. I never would've lost my baby —"

"That was *your* fault!" TPYMK yelled.

"I never would've even become pregnant if I didn't meet you," Sarafina said, aiming the gun squarely at his forehead. "I could've just carried on with my life. I never would've been roped into this mess."

"Roped into what?" TPYMK asked. "You're supposed to be helping me."

"Why on earth would I help *you*?" Sarafina said, almost looking disgusted at the thought.

"So you just want to kill me?" TPYMK asked. "Is that it?"

"No," Sarafina said. "I have to take you."

"Take me where?"

"To Death."

Suddenly, everything clicked into place for the detective.

"Oh… of course. I get it now."

"Get what?" Sarafina said.

"You've been working for Death," TPYMK said. "Ever since you were dealing that night. Am I right?"

Sarafina smiled. "You catch on quick."

"*Do we have a deal?*"

Sarafina's smile grew into a grin. She gladly shook his paw.

"*Deal.*"

Death grinned back. "Well, then," he said. "Welcome to the business, Sarafina."

Sarafina's happiness was evident.

"*Thank you… sir.*"

"*This is very pleasing, Sarafina," Death told her. "But, if you are going to become a part of this business, then you have to do something for me first.*"

"*Like what?*" *asked Sarafina.*

"*I want you to help me kill Detective TPYMK.*"

"I've been helping him all this time," Sarafina said. "Why not? I can make millions."

"So you planned this all," TPYMK concluded.

"You've ruined everything," Sarafina spat with venom. "You even made me experience the death of a child. But now I can have my revenge. And it is gonna *rock*."

"You little rat," TPYMK said, feeling both betrayed and infuriated by this sudden revelation. "I should've known better than to trust you."

"Too bad," Sarafina said. "Now, let's go. Death will be waiting for us."

"*Get in there!*"

Sarafina forced TPYMK through the door of the lab, and he almost ended up tumbling down a set of metallic steps. He managed to grab onto the handrail to steady himself, however.

The lioness kept her gun pointed at him every step of the way; there was no chance of him ever disarming her. And he wasn't sure if he had it in him to kill Sarafina, anyway…

Whether the same could be said for her was a different matter entirely.

TPYMK stared at the interior of the Sumu lab, gawping in surprise at the highly technical equipment housed within. It was more than enough to make any kind of drug – and in a huge quantity, too. A few of these places and you could be selling Sumu all around the world…

Stood on the tiled floor of the lab were three people.

Death was stood in the centre, with Nala and Wazimu on either side of him.

TPYMK's eyes widened in horror at the sight of his former friend.

"Wazimu?"

The chemist just glared at him.

Sarafina shoved TPYMK down the steps, causing him to land hard on his chest, knocking the wind out of him.

"Get up!" Sarafina growled, wrenching the detective upwards by his hair. "You goddamn cop."

"So you're in on this, too?" TPYMK asked Wazimu. "Both of you just pretending to be my friends, were you?"

"No," Wazimu said, finally speaking. "I'm just using my talents to make a much better salary. Better than being a petty lab assistant or a high school chemistry teacher."

Death smiled at the sight of the detective. "Ah, Detective TPYMK," he said. "So nice of you to join us."

"Screw you," TPYMK said, only for Sarafina to jab the gun in his face.

"Speak when spoken to," she ordered.

He spat in her face.

"*Ugh!*" She backed away in disgust.

"It's okay, Sarafina," Death said. "Don't mind his poor manners. He won't be in the land of the living for much longer."

"I had a feeling you'd say something like that," TPYMK said. "Pretty good way to get rid of me, actually. You have all these chemicals here. You could just shoot me in the head and then dissolve my body in hydrofluoric acid. No traces left. Clever. I'll give you that."

"Cleverer than you, I'm afraid, Detective," Death retorted. He looked at Sarafina. "He fell for it, then?"

"Hook, line and sinker," Sarafina replied with a malevolent smile. "He didn't have a clue."

Death chuckled. "Oh, Detective, I'm surprised you had no suspicions," he told him. "Not even when you caught her selling drugs. She must've been a very good actor."

"How much are you paying her?" TPYMK asked.

"Oh, since it was for the purpose of getting rid of you, she'll have more money than she knows how to spend," Death answered. "I think she'd like somewhere nice to settle down – especially since she's not buying my product anymore."

"You're better than this, Sarafina," TPYMK said to her. "I thought we were supposed to be partners."

Sarafina chuckled. "You can't stop this operation, TPYMK," she told him. "You didn't have a chance."

"Take his weapon, Sarafina," Death commanded. "He's a sneaky character. That's how he killed my dealer in a neighbouring city."

Sarafina shoved her paw inside TPYMK's trenchcoat pocket, retrieving his pistol. "Got it," she said. "He won't be able to try anything now."

"Excellent," Death said. "Nala, fetch a chair. I want him secured."

"I should've seen it before," TPYMK said, glowering at Nala. "Your husband was just as much of a psycho as you were."

"I think you'll find that I'm much better than him," Nala said over her shoulder, as she grabbed a wooden chair from the corner of the lab. "I take a twenty-five per cent cut from my wonderful boss."

"Nala is my faithful second-in-command," Death told him. "She organises all of my business dealings. She's the one who brought me into contact with Aibu – before you ended that sector of my business in a heartbeat. Now it's time for payback."

Death grinned sinisterly at Nala. "Tie him up."

Five minutes later, TPYMK had been tied to the chair with rope. He couldn't move his arms or legs. At least they hadn't applied

some duct tape to his mouth… That would have just been embarrassing.

"So what happens now?" TPYMK asked.

"We kill you," Death said. "It's all been leading up to this, Detective. The appearance of the Interceptor was just a simple distraction. To throw you off the scent. You never would've expected that the *real* assassin was right under your nose all along."

"Remind me never to trust anyone ever again," TPYMK said.

"You won't *have* to trust anyone ever again," Death said. "I think it's time that you were finally put out of your misery."

"I trusted you," TPYMK told Sarafina. "Everything I've done for you, and this is how you repay me."

Sarafina shrugged. "Life sucks that way," she retorted.

"I think, Sarafina," Death said, looking at the lioness, "that since you were *such* an effective employee, you deserve to deliver the killing blow – or *shot*, as it were." He gestured to the pistol she held in her paw. "Go on. Enjoy yourself."

Sarafina stared at the gun in her grasp – and smiled.

"Sarafina," TPYMK said, as the lioness stood in front of him. "You don't have to do this. This isn't like you."

Sarafina frowned, pointing the gun at TPYMK's forehead.

"You don't know anything about me."

"Please," TPYMK said. "Don't do this. We can stop them. Together."

"There is no 'we'," Sarafina said.

Her grip on the gun tightened.

TPYMK stared downwards.

Defeated.

"You were my best friend," he admitted, allowing everyone to hear him.

Sarafina stared into his eyes.

"Well, you weren't mine."

And she pulled the trigger.

To Be Continued...

AN: I think I writer-squealed when I came up with this plot. Really. It was just one of those ideas that hit you at one hundred miles an hour. Sarafina was working for Death ever since she accepted his offer to become a dealer. Genius! God, I love writing!

And now I've left you on what could possibly be one of my worst cliffhangers yet. Well, what else did you expect from the final story? An easy ride? Of course not! So, with that, I'll see you next time, for the final ever story of *Poison*!